

# Religious Identity and Value Systems of Future Preschool Teachers

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This topic is urgent in Tatarstan (RF region) nowadays as young people, including students, future preschool teachers, actively join religious organizations. This paper presents facts of young people showing latent national and religious aggression, which can lead to religious extremism. The purpose of the research is to elicit the specific nature of religious identity in the context of value system development among female university students, and future preschool teachers. Methods of the research included monitoring students' activity in different kinds of academic activity and practical work; interviewing students; Religions Orientation Scale (Allport G., Ross J.); values scales (Schwartz). As a result we determined that most students share external religious attitude. Visiting cults, participation in religious ceremonies which are the means to prove their belonging to generally accepted mode of life. The information can be useful to the university professors to personalize the process of professional training, to use the technologies of developing and self-developing moral and professional values in future preschool teachers.

**Keywords:** religious identity; value system; university training for preschool teachers; future preschool teachers

## INTRODUCTION

### Relevance of the subject

Preschool teachers training in Russia has been dramatically changing in recent years (Gabdulkhakov & Kalimullin, 2014). New Education Standards have been conducted; the society's and employers' requirements are increasing, so teachers of a new type are in demand. They should not only have necessary professional competence, but also high moral values (Kalimullin, 2014; Ilbay & Akin, 2014; Karimova & Valeeva, 2014; Baser & Kilinc, 2015; Valeeva, 2015; Bilgin & Aykac, 2016). Multi-confessional and multi-ethnic society of the Republic of Tatarstan show an increase of religiosity in all groups and especially among young people (Drobizheva, 2011; Mukhametshin, 2006; Khodzhayeva & Shumilova, 2008), there are new informal youth Muslim organizations (Guzelbaeva, 2012). It is proved that religious people are better stress-resistant, feel inner psychological weightiness,

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protection, love for people, conation to continuous self-improvement (Chesnokova, 2005). Religious people have their own scale of values, morality is their inner property. These personal qualities are necessary for future teachers to work with kids and their parents (Suchkova, 2009; Colak, Altinkurt & Yilmaz, 2014). Students, including future teachers, can have latent national aggression, which can affect pedagogical activity (Gabdulkhakov & Yashina, 2015). A preschool teacher must be extremely careful not to have dislike and distrust to people of different nationality and to religion in children. On the one hand preschool teacher's religiosity is welcomed as such teachers follow moral values in their behavior; on the other hand there is the threat of religious and national aggression and religious extremism. In this regard the research on relation of future teachers' religious identity and value systems becomes necessary in realization of scientifically grounded strategies of personalized spiritual-moral upbringing and prevention of terrorism and religious extremism (Rip, Vallerand & Lafreniere, 2012).

Investigation of this problem is important to prevent in the course of study at the university, the development of unwanted value systems related to religious identity.

The data received is essential for constructing the system of preschool teacher's professional training with due consideration of his/her religious and value affiliation. In our research we used social-psychological approach which allows studying the mind of a future teacher both in group and individually.

## **Problem statement**

Religious identity is considered as one of the first social identities of a person. It is a multidimensional process, which plays an important role in formation of personal, philosophical and existential worldview (Assor et al., 2005). Scholars identify several dimensions of the latter: phenomenological, anthropological, social, theological, geographical and others. (Krylov, 2012).

As religious identity has collective and individual expression, this paper offers different ways of its consideration. (Allport & Ross, 1967; Dollinger, 2001; Abu-Rayya & White, 2010; Ryan & Deci, 2006).

Many authors specify the connection between religious identity and educator's professional activity (Hoffmann, 2009; Edelbrock, Schweitzer & Biesinger, 2010; Lytsiousi, 2014; Fleck & Leimgruber, 2011; Kuusisto & Lamminmäki-Vartia, 2010). For a religious teacher it is easier to cope with stress and fears as his/her degree of emotional subjective comfort is higher (Emmons, 2004; Wei, 2013). The connection between feasibility of physical punishment and religiosity was elicited (Khoury-Kassabr, Attar-Schwartz & Zur, 2014). Religious identity is considered as a factor of tolerance of interpersonal relationships (Shcherbakova, 2010).

Religious identity in multicultural society is a result of ethnic identity and is often understood by people as adherence to cultural tradition of their own ethnic group. (Mchedlov, 2006). In recent years' religious identity is often considered as psychological phenomenon. A number of factors affect a person's religious identity formation: education, mass media, family (Pismannik, 2011). As a part of self-consciousness, religious identity defines cognitive, conative, and emotional spheres of a person. It affects a person's behavior in real interpersonal, international, inter-confessional interactions. In the religious identity structure three components can be determined: 1) conscious identification of yourself with transcendent; 2) molding of personal features and personal value systems; 3) self-identification with a definite religious community, acceptance of its values, doctrine (Sokolovskaya, 2015).

Allport (Allport, 2002) defined two types of religious orientation: external (undeveloped) and internal (genuine) religious orientation. External orientation includes people for whom religion is only the way to achieve life goals, external relation to religion itself. They try to prove their social presentation, loyalty to

generally accepted mode of life by means of attending ceremonial places, participating in religious ceremonies and formal godliness. This behavior does not unite but separate people. Internal religious orientation includes people for whom religion is independent and is of final value. The people of this kind follow their religion norms and rules in their work and behavior. Religious searching is of value and end in itself. In religious people with inner religious feeling, there is tolerance, mercy, empathy predominate. These individuals are inclinable to people of different religious ideology, and different values systems.

Human values - is an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence (Rokeach, 1973). The system of values defines human's orientation, views on the outside world, other people and himself (Bilsky, & Schwartz, 1994; Barnea & Schwartz, 1998; Struch, Schwartz, & Kloot, 2002). Schwartz considered the difference between values on the basis of the types of conative goals they express. He classified separate values according to the similarity of their goals: Power – this is social status, predominance over humans and resources; Achievement - personal success according to social standards; Hedonism - delight or material pleasures; Stimulation - excitement and novelty; Self-Direction - independence of thoughts and actions; Universalism - understanding, tolerance and caring other humans' well-being; Benevolence - maintenance and improvement of close people well-being; Tradition - respect and liability for cultural and religious customs and ideas; Conformity - control over actions and motions, ability to do harm to other people and don't follow social expectations; Security - security and stability in the society, relations and self (Schwartz, 1994).

For a preschool teacher, values are closely connected with the professional activity. In work with children the values are aimed at establishing, strengthening and spreading the most significant values, aimed at a child, his health and security, upbringing and development, comfort and stable socialization in the educational space of a preschool (Kudashkina, 2010). In the process of studying at university, students can form necessary social, moral and professional values (Petrova, 2015; Salykhova, 2013; Bichurina, 2012). Despite many researches in psychology, sociology, and education, the problem of relations between religious identity and values is still urgent, especially when we discuss preschool teacher's training. We supposed that preschool teachers' religious identity is connected with their values (Shaikhelislamov, Shaekhova & Murzalinova, 2016). Religious identity defines the attitude to others and the world, affects the behavior and future professional activity.

## **METHODS**

Research tasks are the following:

1. To define the values of future preschool teachers when studying at the university.
2. To study the types of religious identity in this test group.
3. To find the connection between religious identity and values of future preschool teachers.

We used various methods: theoretical study of literary sources; monitoring students' activity in different kinds of academic activity and practical work; interviewing students; Religions Orientation Scale (Allport G. & Ross J., 1967); values Scale by Schwartz (Schwartz, 1992).

With Allport and Ross Scales we defined possible types of religious orientations: "continuous internal religiosity"; "continuous external religiosity"; "incontinuous religiosity"; "nonreligious people". We recorded the following factors: the intensity

of internal religiosity (refers to internal religiosity subscale); the intensity of external religiosity (refers to external religiosity subscale); index of religiosity (refers to internal religiosity subscale and external religiosity subscale). We recorded the types of values in the chosen groups on Schwartz Scale. We calculated the average score for each of 10 values types in each test group at the level of normative ideals (beliefs) and at the level of individual priorities (in particular actions). Then we ranked each type of values from 1 to 10 according to the size of average performance. The ranks were specific for each test group. Grades from 1 to 3 given to the relevant values were considered as high significance in this test group. Grades from 7 to 10 show their low significance for the test group (Karandashev, 2004).

We've monitored and interviewed students aged 18-20 for several years. There was no much difference in beliefs of students of different years, which is proved by mathematical statistics methods. Allport and Schwartz Scales were offered to 60 students, 30 of them were Russians and 30 were Tatars.

## RESULTS

Future preschool teachers' interviews allowed us to confirm our supposition that confessional identification is an essential element of ethnic self-determination in the Republic of Tatarstan. In the question: "What religion do you belong to?" all respondents chose the religion in accordance with their ethnic background - 30 Tatars chose Islam, 30 Russians chose Orthodoxy. It can be explained by the fact that Russians have always understood Orthodoxy as well as Tatars have understood Islam as part of their national and cultural heritage. None of the students identified his/herself as "nonreligious".

The analysis of the data obtained after processing religion orientation resulted in the eliciting of two students' groups. The first group with "continuous external religious orientation" included those students who got low rates in both scales. They were about 33% (13% Muslims and 20% Orthodox). For them religion is following generally accepted traditions and they need it to be established in the society. The students of this group consider it obligatory to participate in the ceremonies of birth, marriage and death occasions. They visit places of cult quite often, sometimes they read religious literature and they think it is necessary. In everyday life they prefer to follow laical norms.

Other respondents had average results on both scales. We ranged them in the group of students with "incontinuous external religious orientation" - about 67% (30% Muslims and 37% orthodox). This group showed both external and internal religious aspects though not very stable. Students hesitate about religion, sometimes about God's existence. They seldom attend places of cult, usually when they need some support in difficult situations, for example, before exams. These groups of students take part in some religious ceremonies, but only occasionally read religious literature and say prayers. In everyday situations they follow mainly laical values.

As a result all respondents are in "external religious orientation" category. There was no group with "continuous internal religious orientation" during our research. There were no students with deep belief feelings, with value attitude to religion. This was confirmed by interviews and monitoring.

The calculation of data, obtained after processing the figures on scale of value systems, is presented in the tables.

Scoring the points obtained after defining the level of normative ideals and the level of individual priorities allowed us to range the values.

**Table 1.** Average significance of values types at the level of normative ideals.

Types of values	Average performance of values types			
	Group of students with "continuous external religious orientation"		Group of students with "incontinuous external religious orientation"	
	Muslims	Orthodox	Muslims	Orthodox
Conformity	4.53	4.25	4.55	3.96
Traditions	4.40	3.63	3.86	3.56
Kindness	<b>5.17</b>	<b>4.77</b>	4.69	4.38
Universalism	4.73	3.79	4.77	3.73
Self-dependence	4.72	4.28	<b>4.80</b>	<b>4.40</b>
Stimulation	4.62	4.36	4.33	3.90
Hedonism	4.82	3.91	4.56	4.01
Achievement	<b>5.30</b>	<b>4.47</b>	<b>5.04</b>	<b>4.43</b>
Power	3.21	3.56	3.56	3.57
Safety	<b>5.63</b>	<b>5.21</b>	<b>5.40</b>	<b>5.33</b>

**Table 2.** Average significance of values types at the level of individual priorities

Types of values	Average performance of values types			
	Group of students with "continuous external religious orientation"		Group of students with "incontinuous external religious orientation"	
	Muslims	Orthodox	Muslims	Orthodox
Conformity	2.03	1.91	2.01	1.79
Traditions	2.31	1.54	2.22	1.47
Kindness	<b>2.53</b>	<b>2.79</b>	<b>2.62</b>	<b>2.89</b>
Universalism	2.41	2.46	2.47	2.49
Self-dependence	2.46	<b>2.68</b>	2.68	2.89
Stimulation	2.02	2.52	2.05	2.71
Hedonism	<b>2.50</b>	2.47	<b>2.92</b>	<b>2.87</b>
Achievement	2.21	2.70	2.38	2.68
Power	1.56	1.73	1.81	1.51
Safety	<b>2.54</b>	<b>2.82</b>	<b>2.59</b>	<b>2.90</b>

**Table 3.** Rank score of values in groups with different types of religious identity on the level of normative ideals

Types of values	Average performance of values types			
	Group of students with "continuous external religious orientation"		Group of students with "incontinuous external religious orientation"	
	Muslims	Orthodox	Muslims	Orthodox
Conformity	8	6	7	6
Traditions	9	9	9	10
Kindness	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	6	4
Universalism	5	8	5	8
Self-dependence	6	5	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
Stimulation	7	4	8	7
Hedonism	4	7	4	5
Achievement	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
Power	10	10	10	9
Safety	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>

**Table 4.** Rank score of values in groups with different types of religious identity on the level of individual priorities

Types of values	Average performance of values types			
	Group of students with "continuous external religious orientation"		Group of students with "incontinuous external religious orientation"	
	Muslims	Orthodox	Muslims	Orthodox
Conformity	8	8	9	6
Traditions	6	10	7	10
Kindness	3	2	2	2
Universalism	5	7	5	8
Self-dependence	4	3	4	4
Stimulation	9	5	8	7
Hedonism	2	6	1	3
Achievement	7	4	6	5
Power	10	9	10	9
Safety	1	1	3	1

## DISCUSSIONS

In the chosen groups of students, the values "security" and "achievements" are the most significant both for Muslims and orthodox on the level of normative ideals. This means that these students aimed at security of people and themselves, harmony and stability of society and relations. At the same time, they aim at personal success by demonstrating competence in accordance with social standards. The group with "continuous external religious orientation", on the level of normative idea, defined "kindness" as the most significant value. It helps them to save the well-being of the people they communicate with. The students from the group "incontinuous external religious orientation" defined Self-dependence as the most significant both for Muslims and for Orthodox. This gives evidence that students aim at self-control and self-management. They display need for autonomy and independence. The most insignificant values both for Muslims and for Orthodox were Traditions, Power and Conformity. Future teachers do not intend to keep to humility, respect for traditions, godliness, modesty and do not tend to predominate over people and resources.

On the level of individual priorities, we proved the changes in the structure of some values in both groups. In the group of Muslims with "continuous external religious orientation" the most significant value was Hedonism besides Safety and Kindness. In real life they want pleasure and enjoyment. In the group of Orthodox students with "continuous external religious orientation" we also noticed the value-Self-dependence besides Safety and Kindness. The girls aim at self-dependence of mind and the choice of the mode of action, in creative and research work. In the group with "incontinuous external religious orientation", both for Muslims and Orthodox students, the most significant were Safety, Kindness and Hedonism.

Correlation of the values with highest priority in different groups of respondents let us conclude that for all future preschool teachers, the values Safety and Kindness are at a level of belief and behavior. But values Achievement and Self-dependence are not strong for them. The students aim at personal achievements and Self-dependence, but they often follow Hedonism values in real life. At the same time the value Traditions including religious traditions is not a motivation for their behavior. Most of the students don't want to restrain themselves in actions and tastes which do not answer social expectations (Conformity). The Power value is constantly last.

## CONCLUSIONS

The personality, that is, the psyche of a preschool teacher is essential for the adequate development of preschool children. In the sample group of future preschool teachers we studied the level of their religiosity. We found out that all the respondents identified themselves as believers, religious people, though religion has not become an independent value for them. Religious identity of future preschool teachers is determined by their ethnic identity and depends on the religion they belong to: Orthodoxy for Russians and Islam for Tatars. The research has not identified any contrasts in value systems between groups of different religious orientation and ethnic make-up. Value systems and social behavior of most future preschool teachers is often regulated not by religious norms and rules, but mostly by personal interests and laical values. We haven't determined any essential dependence of values for students on their confessional identification. Our supposition that religious identity is connected with formation of the student's personality value systems and this affects the structure of these values, was proved true. Although, it doesn't mean that there is no such problem in the educative process of the university. It is necessary to regularly monitor the religious and values mindset of future teachers, to provide conditions for personalized forming of high moral qualities.

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